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FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/655/Add.2) relating to the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1056 (1996) of 29 May 1996. During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. The Advisory Committee recalls that in paragraph 20 of its report (A/50/939) on the financing of MINURSO, it recommended, on the basis of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/655/Add.1), the appropriation and assessment of the amount of $52,335,000 gross ($48,456,000 net) for the maintenance of the Mission for the 12-month period beginning on 1 July 1996, to be assessed at the rate of $4,361,250 gross ($4,038,000 net) per month, subject to the extension of the mandate by the Security Council.

3. By its resolution 1056 (1996), the Security Council agreed with the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the identification process be suspended until such time as both parties provide concrete and convincing evidence that they are committed to resuming and completing it without further obstacles. It also supported the proposal of the Secretary-General to reduce the strength of the military component of MINURSO by 20 per cent, on the understanding that this will not impair its operational effectiveness in monitoring the ceasefire. The Council also extended the mandate of the Mission until 30 November 1996.

4. An update to information contained in paragraph 10 of document A/50/655/Add.2, on the status of assessed contributions, was provided. The Advisory Committee was informed that as at 15 September 1996, while a total of $243.7 million had been assessed on Member States from the date of inception, total contributions received for the same period amounted to $192.8 million, leaving a total outstanding assessment of $50.9 million.

5. With regard to the status of reimbursement to troop-contributing Governments, the Advisory Committee was informed that reimbursements have been made through 30 November 1995. The Advisory Committee was also informed that an estimated amount of $363,000 remains outstanding for the period from 1 December 1995 to 31 July 1996.

6. As indicated in annex V to document A/50/655/Add.1, voluntary contributions in kind are provided by the Governments of Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco and the Frente Polisario. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the reduction in military and civilian personnel and the suspension of the identification process would entail concomitant reductions in these contributions, particularly on residential and office accommodation, meals and fuel for vehicles.

7. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 14 of document A/50/655/Add.2 that the revised cost estimates of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997 amount to $31,902,000 gross ($30,132,000 net), representing a 39 per cent decrease in comparison with the original cost estimates of $52,335,000 gross ($48,456,000 net) contained in document A/50/655/Add.1.

8. The Advisory Committee was informed that the number of military personnel is being reduced in phases from 288 to 230 (207 military observers, 8 force orderly staff and 15 military medical personnel) by 1 November 1996. In this connection, the Advisory Committee was also informed that, as at 31 August 1996, there were 264 military personnel on board at MINURSO.

9. As can be seen from paragraph 4 (a) of annex II, section D, to document A/50/655/Add.2 with effect from 1 July 1996, the number of civilian police was reduced from its authorized strength of 160 to 9.

10. In paragraph 5 (a) of annex II, section D, it is proposed to reduce civilian staff from 410 to 167 (102 international and 65 local) posts. However, the Advisory Committee notes from annex IV to document A/50/655/Add.2 that staff resources are being increased from 7 to 18 (1 USG, 1 ASG, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 2 P-4, 2 P-3, 2 P-2 and 5 GS/FS posts and 1 local staff post) under the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and from 24 to 42 under the General Services Section. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the increase in staff resources under the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was attributable to the proposal of the Secretary-General to maintain a political office in Tindouf in order to maintain a dialogue with the parties and the two neighbouring countries (Algeria and Mauritania) and to facilitate efforts towards an agreed formula for the resolution of differences between the parties.

11. With regard to the increase in staff under the General Services Section (1 P-3, 5 FS-Other level and 12 local staff posts), the Advisory Committee was informed that this was necessary because, with the reduction in military personnel who had been responsible for movement control and air operations functions, civilian staff had to undertake those functions.

12. The Advisory Committee notes that under 5 (a) of annex II, section C, to document A/50/655/Add.2, out of a total of 339 vehicles proposed in document A/50/655/Add.1, 209 vehicles will be required under the revised estimates; the remaining 130 vehicles are to be retained in the Mission area for storage. It is the view of the Advisory Committee that in the light of the reduction in staff resources, the number of vehicles is high. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the 209 vehicles were going to be used by civilian as well as military observers. Even then, the Advisory Committee still believes that the number of vehicles appears to be on the high side and trusts that the Secretary-General will keep this item under review. The Advisory Committee also trusts that the vehicles to be retained in the Mission area are properly secured.

13. With regard to air operations, the Advisory Committee notes from paragraphs 8 and 9 of annex II, section D, to document A/50/655/Add.2 that the revised estimates provide for a reduction of one Beechcraft fixed-wing aircraft from a fleet of three helicopters, two Antonov AN-26 aircraft and one Beechcraft fixed-wing aircraft requested in document A/50/655/Add.1. The Advisory Committee once again recalls and reiterates its recommendation in an earlier report on MINURSO (A/50/802), repeated in paragraph 16 of the Committee's previous report (A/50/939), that particular attention be paid to restricting the use of aircraft to essential operational needs and that the most cost-effective contractual arrangement be made with aircraft suppliers.

14. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that provision for landing fees and ground handling, which has not been revised, is based on an average of $2,700 per month.

15. Paragraph 11 of annex II, section D, to document A/50/655/Add.2 provides for an increase of two INMARSAT M terminals. This is in addition to 10 INMARSAT A and one INMARSAT M terminals requested in paragraph 8 of annex II, section C, to document A/50/655/Add.1. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the slight reduction in the size of the north and south sector headquarters of the military observers necessitated the upgrading of existing equipment linking the team sites with one another and with Mission headquarters through the use of the two additional INMARSAT M terminals.

16. With regard to the actions to be taken by the General Assembly, the Advisory Committee concurs with the proposals set out in paragraph 20 (a) to (d) of document A/50/655/Add.2.

17. As indicated in paragraph 16 above, the amount of $13,292,500 gross ($12,555,000 net) for the period from 1 July to 30 November 1996 includes the amount of $526,835 for the support account. In this connection, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/221 B of 7 June 1996, the share of MINURSO to the support account amounts to

$1,264,400 for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. The Advisory Committee was also informed that Assembly decision 50/446 B of 7 June 1996 on the financing of MINURSO included a prorated provision of $316,100 to the support account for the period from 1 July to 30 September 1996.